

ELIZABETH H. BOWEN.

JUNE 1, 1898.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House and ordered to be printed.

Mr. KERR, from the Committee on Invalid Pensions, submitted the following

REPORT.

[To accompany H. R. 5461.]

The Committee on Invalid Pensions, to whom was referred the bill (H. R. 5461) granting a pension to Elizabeth H. Bowen, have examined the same and respectfully report:

This bill proposes to pension at \$20 per month Elizabeth H. Bowen, of Elmira, N. Y., the former wife of Benjamin F. Bowen, who served long and faithfully as chaplain in the Eighth New Jersey Volunteer Infantry, he being a member of Company I.

This is a peculiar but most meritorious case.

The soldier was shot in battle and the bullet became encysted against the heart, causing intolerable pain and affecting the brain so that the soldier's disposition was changed. At times he seemed possessed of the very devil, and his friends thought it all the result of an ungovernable temper. His wife, who was such during the war, having married the soldier in 1862, obtained a divorce on the ground of cruel and inhuman treatment.

Soon it became evident that the soldier was insane and he was taken to a hospital for the insane. When this was discovered the wife returned to and cared for the soldier until his death and in every way was as faithful and devoted in her attendance as woman's love could make her. After death the bullet was found encysted as stated, and it was and is conceded that his death resulted directly from the wound received in battle.

The war wife is old, poor, needy, and unmarried. She is entitled to the pension of \$20 per month her husband's rank (that of captain) would give her had she not obtained the divorce under a misapprehension and mistake of fact.

The bill is reported back with the recommendation that it pass when amended as follows:

Commencing with the word "at," in line 4, strike out all down to and including the word "act," in line 5.

In line 6 strike out "survivor and."

At the end of line 8 add the following: "and pay her a pension at the rate of twenty dollars per month."

ELMIRA, January 7, 1898.

DEAR SIR: By request of friend I write you a statement of facts in regard to my application for pension. Hon. T. E. Burton, from Cleveland, Ohio, has, I believe, all the papers in the case.

I was married to Rev. B. F. Bowen September 22, 1862, in Elmira, N. Y. He was then chaplain under General Banks in the Gulf Department. He served until discharged because of severe illness. Shortly after he enlisted as private in a New York regiment and was wounded, I think in April, 1865. He held different charges and often appeared so strange that his parishioners, as long ago as twenty-three years, came to me and wanted me to consent to their placing him in a private insane asylum. Like all people who live with loved ones suffering from mental disorders, I refused to believe there was anything amiss with him. We had four daughters, and as they grew up they became afraid of his doing me personal harm, and they, with all my most intimate friends, insisted that I get a divorce. All thought it was his ungovernable temper.

I did not think him insane, but did believe the sufferings caused by the wound and the ball which had never been extracted made him do things that he otherwise would not. I was obliged to support myself and children and had a large boarding house in Cleveland, Ohio. Through his actions I often lost my boarders and was in despair, not knowing which way to turn.

At last when we could endure it no longer I was granted a divorce three months after he was placed in the insane asylum at Newburg, a suburb of Cleveland, and I was appointed his guardian by the same judge that committed him to the asylum. When he was able to be taken home I took him out and cared for him, visited him once a week when he could not come home, and was with him at the last. I believe that I have done for him and my children all that mortal could, and if heartache and sorrow and poverty makes a widow worth a pension I believe I am.

Yours, respectfully,

Mrs. L. H. BOWEN,
706 West Second street, Elmira, N. Y.

Hon. GEORGE RAY.

SECOND NATIONAL BANK,
Elmira, N. Y., January 7, 1898.

MY DEAR SIR: I have known of Mrs. Bowen for over twenty years, and knew intimately a sister of hers soon after the war. They belonged to a most estimable family, and while I have not personal knowledge of the facts stated in Mrs. Bowen's letter to you, I have no doubt of their truth and that she ought to have the benefits of a pension. If you can assist in forwarding the bill pending for her benefit it will be greatly appreciated, and seems to me just.

Yours, etc.,

SEYMOUR DEXTER.

Hon. GEORGE RAY,
Washington, D. C.

HEADQUARTERS D. T. WIGGINS POST, 297, G. A. R.,
Randolph, N. Y., December 30, 1897.

DEAR SIR: Through the kindness of our mutual friend, Hon. Charles R. Hall, I had the pleasure of meeting you in Albany two or three years ago, while I was deputy superintendent of banks. Although you may have forgotten the occasion, I would like to recall it as a sort of prelude to what I wish to say.

Hon. T. E. Burton (Cleveland, Ohio), of the House of Representatives, has introduced a bill to grant a pension to Mrs. Elizabeth H. Bowen, who was the wife of Rev. Benjamin F. Bowen, deceased, pensioner of United States, for military service in the war of the rebellion. This soldier had been a chaplain in a regiment in the department, headquarters at New Orleans, La. He received a gunshot wound in the breast and the bullet became encysted against his heart, producing periods of violence and ungovernable passion, through mental disturbance. For about twenty years after the war his wife went through terrible scenes and sufferings with him, not knowing what caused his constantly recurring outbreaks; and at last she was obliged to get a divorce, in Ohio, to save her life from her cruel soldier husband.

But after the divorce was granted for cruelty she had to take him into her family, which she supported as a boarding-house keeper in Cleveland, maintain, nurse, and care for him, until he lapsed into total insanity and was sent to an asylum. Soon after he died, and an autopsy disclosed the pressure of the old bullet on his heart so as to cause periodical, and finally permanent, insanity.

This noble woman, poor and broken in health, can get no pension under general laws, by reason of the divorce to which she was compelled to resort. She suffered a hell on earth for twenty years and more on account of the rebel bullet in her husband's heart. She should have a pension by special act. Substantial grounds justify it. Facts are in possession of your colleague, Mr. Burton.

I have no financial interest in Mrs. Bowen's claim. I knew her husband as a Baptist clergyman, located where I now reside, and for five years witnessed the poor woman's terrible trials and struggles to keep the public gaze off the family skeleton. I have seen members of the family frequently since they lived in Ohio, and have kept posted as to the facts of the divorce and death of the soldier and the destitute condition and ill-health of Mrs. Bowen.

If necessary, affidavits can be procured here of Bowen's abuse of and cruelty to his wife and arrests for same.

Yours, very respectfully,

RODNEY R. CROWLEY,
Commander Post 297, New York.

Hon. GEORGE W. RAY,
House of Representatives, Washington, D. C.

MY DEAR SIR: I wish to make a contribution to the matter regarding the pension of Benjamin F. Bowen, of Cleveland, Ohio. I was his attending physician while he was an insane patient in our State asylum at Newburg, Ohio. My affidavits are with the Commissioner of Pensions. I only wish to state that it is my opinion that his wife did not appreciate his condition in the incipency of his disease, and construed his conduct as badness instead of madness. At that time the family were forced by his conduct to protect themselves in some way. Afterwards as a patient she called to see him regularly and often, and bestowed upon him the same attention and affection as she was wont to before being divorced. His case was a very severe one, and finally he died of the direct effects of the disease upon his brain.

Very truly,

EUGENE G. CARPENTER.

Hon. GEO. W. RAY,
Chairman of Committee on Invalid Pensions, Washington, D. C.

THE DWIGHT FARM AND LAND COMPANY, OF NORTH DAKOTA.
Elmira, N. Y., January 12, 1898.

MY DEAR SIR: I inclose you a letter from Mrs. Bowen, of this city, regarding a bill which she has before your committee. This matter has been called to my attention by some of the best people in this city, and I have no doubt whatever as to the justice of the claim. You will notice what Judge Seymour Dexter, president of the Second National Bank, says regarding the matter. He is an old soldier himself, and one of our best citizens here. If you can do anything in this matter I have no doubt but what it is one of the deserving cases.

With best regards, I am, as ever, yours very truly,

JOHN W. DWIGHT.

Hon. GEORGE W. RAY,
House of Representatives, Washington, D. C.

PROBATE JUDGE'S OFFICE, CUYAHOGA COUNTY,
Cleveland, Ohio, April 20, 1898.

DEAR SIR: I beg to respectfully obtrude upon your attention for a single moment in behalf of a private bill introduced by the Hon. T. E. Burton, of the Twentieth Ohio district, in favor of a pension for Mrs. Elizabeth H. Bowen.

As probate judge the condition of Chaplain Benjamin F. Bowen, now deceased, came to my official attention a number of years ago. At that time, after what we supposed to be a thorough examination by medical experts, he was adjudged, by the probate court of this county, insane and was sent to the Cleveland State hospital, where he some time after died. During his suffering and apparent condition Mrs. Bowen was devoted to him most faithfully, and in every respect demeaned herself as a loving and devoted wife. Mr. Bowen was a man of very brilliant mind, and had been a most loyal and efficient soldier during the war of the rebellion, having twice enlisted, serving first as a chaplain and afterwards as a private. The testimony

before the probate court in the case bore especially upon what was then found by the medical experts to be a delusion in Mr. Bowen that he had a minie ball lodged in his lung. After he died the post-mortem developed the fact that it was not a delusion, but that the man had suffered untold agony all the years subsequent to receiving the wound.

Without undertaking to go into details as to the history of his case, permit me to emphasize the fact that during all this period of suffering on his part, and consequent irregular conduct, his wife sacrificed her comfort and bestowed upon him the most loving care and attention, without reference to her legal relation to him in any sense; and from what I know of Mrs. Bowen and her family I have not the slightest doubt that to award her a reasonable pension under this measure would be an act of simple justice to the wife and family of a most brilliant, disinterested, and patriotic soldier, who lost his life in his devotion to duty.

Mrs. Bowen now is very much prostrated with a serious and irksome disease, and is very much in need of whatever can be awarded to her by the provisions of this bill.

Very respectfully, yours,

HENRY C. WHITE,
Probate Judge.

Hon. GEORGE W. RAY,
*Chairman Committee on Invalid Pensions,
House of Representatives, Washington, D. C.*

HEADQUARTERS D. T. WIGGINS POST, 297, G. A. R.,
Randolph, N. Y., January 4, 1898.

DEAR SIR: Yours of 3d instant received. I believe that Hon. T. E. Burton has printed copies of cases in the courts of Ohio setting forth all the necessary proofs you mention. The suits were brought to set aside the divorce, after the death of Bowen and after the autopsy had shown the presence and pressure of the bullet in a manner to cause insanity. Evidence was therein given showing that Mrs. Bowen "procured her divorce purely and simply upon the ground of the cruelty of the husband, which showed finally to be the result of insanity," and establishing by experts in anatomy and surgery that the encysted bullet and its pressure on the heart caused the mental outbreaks and finally insanity. It seems to me that these printed cases made for use and used in the courts at Cleveland, Ohio, furnish the best possible evidence as a basis for this claim.

Yours, very truly,

RODNEY R. CROWLEY.

Hon. GEORGE W. RAY,
House of Representatives, Washington, D. C.